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ABSTRACT

The communications barrier confronting the ghetto child, the child from Appalachia, or the reservation Indian is the standard middle-class English taught in most schools. Ways of dissolving this barrier are suggested. Speaking habits as well as thinking patterns of teachers must frequently alter. A child should be encouraged to verbalize and to share his feelings and experiences with others and to be made aware that reading is the sharing of the knowledge or experience of the author with the reader. It is the educator's duty, responsibility, and privilege to provide every student with the opportunity to advance as far as his capabilities allow by teaching him the skills needed to break the communication barrier. References are included. (NH)

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BREAKING THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER

A scream, a groan, the cooing of a baby or the laugh of a child are messages conveyed in their simplest form, yet their meaning may be complex. Our needs are satiated through similar ways by ordering from a menu, reading the advertisements in a newspaper or by stopping at a stop sign. We persuade others to our biases, express anger and elaborate a theory in a classroom through speech, by using a filmstrip, a field trip or a supplemental book. We are simultaneously receivers and senders of messages expressed through gestures and actions, words and pictures, and noises and conversation.

The process of communications is structurally simple, requiring a sender (encoder), a message and receiver (decoder). The sender,

however must have command of a code. The "Standard English" which is the middle class, dictionary, textbook code taught in most schools confronts the speaker of the "non-standard English" dialect of the glum ghetto or sophisticated urban centers, the reservation Indian or the "uneducated" child living in Appalachia. A study by Vincent Skinner (9) suggests another set of codes described by Basil Bernstein (a British sociolinguist). These codes (restrictive and elaborate) conform to the grammatical structure of the "standard" language, but the degree of verbalization by the child limits one code. The sender must also desire to communicate and have the physical and mental qualities to complete the task of communication.

The potential message must have the possibilities of translation into a valid code which should be common to the sender and receiver. The experience of the receiver needs to be sufficiently close to the sender in order to decode the message. Again, the physical and mental qualities to decode the message are imperative.

The language development of a child starts when

> the mother produces a specific word-pattern just before and as she confronts the child. Positive emotional feelings are evoked by these word-patterns and during random vocalization the child will experience emotional feedback when he approximates the mother's word-pattern. The child repeats the word approximations and refines it because his satisfaction increases as he produces the word-pattern more accurately. The child retains the learned word-pattern because of the feedback received from the social approval of his speech. (3)

> A U.N.E.S.C.O. report stated that 'It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind work automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically it means identification... Educationally he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar medium.' (4)

The research by Skinner in Maine concludes that in "...semi-rural and rural children; order and discipline are valued above all and exploration--both physical and verbal--is virtually prohibited." (9) The restrictive and elaborate codes previously mentioned are determined by these priorities in the environment. The restrictive code seems to be the "here and now" verbalization pattern of the lower class child. The Maine children were asked to explain a picture but were unable to verbalize outside of what they actually saw in the picture. The children with elaborate codes could verbalize outside of the "here and now" context of the picture. The restrictive code of the Maine children was due to the weak verbal conditioning in the home and society. The children of Appalachia "...have a language system, a very complex and sophisticated system at that, but it is not the language system of educated people in most sections of the country." (8) All of their textbooks and materials are in "Standard English," and the child is asked to perform in a new and strange code. The child is at a disadvantage because of the "...lack of opportunity to participate in standard American English because of geographic isolation, parental lack of education, and fewer opportunities for exposure to the mass media of communication." (8) The oral language of Appalachia, with its syntactical and pronunciational differences, necessitates that the student not only learn the oral and graphic symbols but also learn the "standard language" in order to read a textbook. The Negro is confronted by a similar problem. "The disadvantaged Negro must not only decode the written word but must also translate them into his own language." (4) The black dialect may cause the child to read "hep" for

help or "boil" for ball and this is incorrect--in "Standard English." When rhyming is taught and his response of han (hand) and man is incorrect he is again the victim of his own vernacular. The Negro and Appalachian child are challenged and confounded by: (1) a new language and a new syntax, (2) the necessity to learn the meaning of oral and graphic symbols, and (3) an idea that the language pattern of his society may be incorrect because of an inability to equate the written code and oral language. The restrictive code of the Maine child caused by the limiting verbal priorities of his environment categorize him also as a non- or slow-reader.

Since writing is often conversation in graphic symbols and reading is the interpretation of these symbols and their meaning a brief summary of Walter D. Loban's study (2) about language parrern is necessary.

1. During the first seven years of schooling, subjects spoke more words in each succeeding year when they were measured. As they progressed, members of the high group used more and longer communication units than did the low sub-groups.

2. The lower group said less than the high group during the first few years of schooling and some had more difficulty in saying it.

3. The low group used more partial expressions than the high group.

4. Lack of agreement between subject and predicate--third person singular and consistency of verb tense proved major problems. Difficulty increase for Negro boys grades 1-3; difficulty decreased for Negro girls.

5. For southern background using the verb "to be" appropriately proved to be twelve times as troublesome as for northern subjects.

6. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening showed a positive relationship.

Again the spectre of a limited level of communication from the low group haunts the teacher. A study by Shriner (7) on the length of verbal responses of children indicated that among other causes, the response will vary with socioeconomic status, and with stimulus materials.

Thus far the communication gap has been caused by the interaction of a scarcity of language development, the limited verbal priorities of a society and/or the problem of *non-standard versus "Standard English."* The causes of failure at precise or even partial communication are of primary importance, but what problems exist if the language development is adequate.

The understanding between sender and receiver rarely if ever reaches 100 percent. Both or either one may have mechanical weaknesses which distort the message. The sender may have a speech impediment or a restricted vocabulary, while the receiver could have a hearing loss or be hampered by visual problem such as color blindness. Even if two people have an identical experience, their own perception and interpretation of it would vary and the recount of it would be limited to the depth of involvement and the ability to vocalize feelings and emotions. The recount is limited because words have different meanings, shades of meaning or many times we have our own personal meaning for a word. Often the mood or temperament of the sender or receiver influences his reaction to our verbalizations. All of us have had a bad day, and any remarks made to us at that time have resulted in anger or misunderstanding. Finally, but probably of most importance is that both the sender and receiver must be

"tuned in," involved and open minded.

In this selection, Ricky is a figment of the imagination, but his potential problems are representative of many students.

Ricky entered the large building hesitantly. (His parents had warned him not to sass the teacher or the other children, to behave and not to get them into trouble again, and to listen and do what he was told.) The hallway was noisy, confusing, and frustrating. Where was Room 20, he didn't want to be late but he couldn't remember how he and his mother had found it before.

"Get outa my way."

"Ya lost?"

"Uh huh," Room 20?"

"Down there, four doors."

"Good morning Ricky, I see you found us without any trouble."

"Uh huh." I find a chair in de back, ain't nobody gonna see me and I don't gotta talk to nobody."

"Ricky is a new student and I'd like all of you to make sure he feels at home here."

"Hey Ricky, you play ball?"

"Uh huh."

"Your good Ricky, real good, want to play after school?"

"Uh huh, yes."

"Ricky, all of us write our own stories, would you like to try one with this group over here?"

"Uh, huh."

"Let's talk about transportation or how we get from one place to

another."

"Cars, buses, truck, bicycle, airplanes."

"I hitchhike."

"That's good Ricky."

"My dad told me never to hitchhike because you never know who's going to pick you up."

"Ricky, tell me about your hitchhiking, and I'll write it on this chart."

"Can you read this back to me now? Good, are there any words in there that you don't understand or can't say? Okay, put this on tape recorder. Don, show Ricky how to use the tape recorder. Let's go over this tape, you listen and tell me if your recording and mine sound the same; follow the words on your story sheet."

"You say the words other than me, they ain't got the same sound."

"You can understand them and follow them on your piece of paper, can't you?"

"Uh huh."

"That's all I want you to do right now. I see you played ball with some of the kids, do you want to write about it?"

"Uh, huh, I'll try, I ain't to good at spelling or writn."

"That's all right. Try."

I play ball yesterda with sume boys.
Lu Alcindur is the bestest ball player.
He is tall and kwik and he maks mane pontz. I seen him on the T.V. the other da. I gonna play lik he sumeda. I ain't never gonna be so big as he.

"Ricky I'm going to tape that story the way I would say it and then let's compare it. Let's change the spelling of certain words. Where would you find more information on Lew Alcindor? Okay, go down to the library and find that magazine. When you come back I want to go over some word changes and we'll read some of the article. Paul, you and Ricky read that article on Lew Alcindor."

"Yes Paul, you and Ricky can talk about Lew Alcindor and Willis Reed in the playoffs."

"Ricky, Reed is still better than Alcindor because he outscored and outrebounded him."

"Uh, huh--but Lew is a rookie, he ain't played as much as Reeds done, you wait'll next year."

Our means of communication is predominantly language and one of the primary purposes of our educational system is to teach him how to use not only his brain but also the means of deploying the fruits of it. The degree to which we accomplish this purpose is partially dependent upon the student's capabilities and at what developmental stage he is at when he enters school. We, as his guides, must start at his level and thoroughly and positively proceed down the long, painful, agonizing process of language development. Often we begin at a sub-standard English level, which must be elevated to the standard level in order that he has the capabilities to adjust into the society. During this uphill fight his ego, attitudes and personality must not be bruised or destroyed but reinforced, changed and strengthened. The drop-out, the reading failure, the discipline problem and the militant, resentful student are all examples

of our failure in accomplishing our purpose of communication.

The Language Experience Approach (L.E.A.) illustrated with Ricky, has great potential. The teacher accepts the child's language patterns and slowly and painstakenly changes them so that the child is able to fit into both his own environment and the larger society. The L.E.A. uses teacher-student made materials. The child is generally correct in his responses or stories, controls his own vocabulary and has the ego--satisfaction of self made materials. The student, through discussion, rebuttals and exchange of ideas, is taught to listen carefully, think thoroughly, talk purposefully and read and write critically. The basal program can be effectively incorporated into the L.E.A., through the teaching of a sequential basic word attack skills program found in them. Vocabulary originates from the child's speaking vocabulary and is therefore functional and understood because it is already in the context. Devices such as group or individual word banks, the illustrating, pantomiming or dramatizing of words, and the use of visual imagery to teach words are possible means of further vocabulary instruction. Since the child relates the anecdote, comprehension has already occurred, but the potential of oral sharing with the group, dramatic representation or the use of a tape recorder, records, filmstrips or films provides an opportunity for an expanded experience of an event or concept for the entire class.

The L.E.A. can be used with many approaches and supplementary materials, but the goals, purposes and behavioral changes desired must be carefully planned and thoroughly understood by the teacher.

Reading is only one skill necessary for communication and with the influence of radio and television it has declined in importance to many people because it's easier to listen to Walter Cronkite than to read a newspaper. If we can teach the student an appreciation for reading and the desire to learn we have accomplished a magnanimous task. The L.E.A. plus a sequential word attack skills program, a considerate interested teacher, the opportunity to expand the personality and ego, and a structured well balanced, child centered classroom would provide an opportunity for growth to the child.

In order to meet the stated purpose of our schools we must frequently alter not only speaking habits but also thinking patterns. We should encourage a child to verbalize and to share his feelings and experiences with others and make him aware that reading is the sharing of the knowledge or experiences of the author with the reader.

Communication is essentially a sharing process between people, accomplished through reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is our duty, responsibility and privilege to provide every student with the opportunity to advance as far as his capabilities allow by teaching him the skills to break the communication barrier.

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Experience Story Analysis

I play ball yesterda with sume boys.
Lu Alcindur is the bestest ball player.
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1. Areas partially and adequately developed

   a. 70% of words correctly spelled
   b. Basic sentence construction good
   c. Understands compound sentences
   d. Understand singular subject-verb agreement
   e. Uses prepositional phrases adequately
   f. Except for beginning sentence, remainder of paragraph follows a logical sequence
   g. Understands paragraph indentation to a degree
   h. Understands comparitive forms (bestest, tall, kwik, lik)
   i. Concepts of degree, comparison and contrase, past, present, and future time.
   j. Self-realization

2. Areas to be developed

   a. Sophistocation of 1. a-j
   b. Teach spelling - multisensory approach
   c. Small group activities for speech pattern improvement
   d. Developing of listening and speaking vocabulary, in order to raise level of reading and writing vocabulary